The Human Touch

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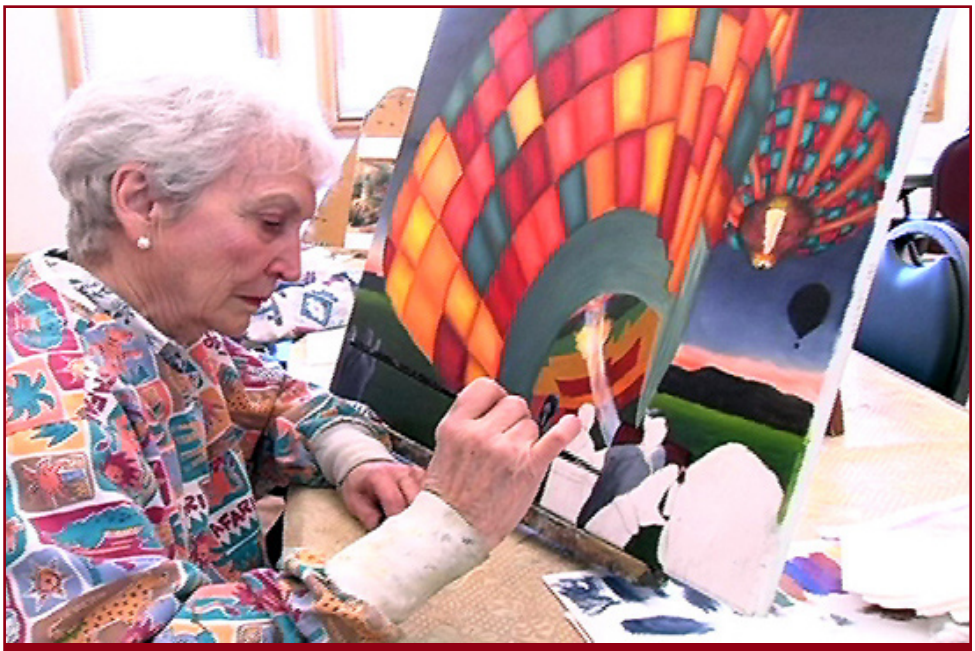
A special Year-end issue highlighting each Division.



Senior artist Patricia Lowder enjoys oil painting at Liberty Senior Center. She is one of many people served by Human Services last year. Please turn to Page 2 to learn about our year's successes as we look forward to the coming year.

Director's Message

Lisa-Michele Church, Executive Director

As you enjoy this Holiday Season, I know you are remembering those less fortunate and helping them feel the holiday spirit as well. I am excited for this issue with its special coverage of the many successes at the Department of Human Services this year. Thank you to Carol Sisco and all the divisions and offices for writing about some of the positive things that happened.

It is very uplifting to celebrate our successes! I realize that many of you go unappreciated for the little things you do, but please know that I recognize your efforts. Every time I am able to visit a field office or talk with a caseworker, I am able to remember why our programs are so important. It is your real-life experience helping others succeed that keeps me going.

I would like to pay special notice to the leadership in Human Services. We have some terrific leaders who constantly challenge the status quo and give us new ideas and creative approaches. Many of the successes in this issue are the result of leaders who refused to be satisfied with "getting by" and pushed on.

I know we are all working with limited resources. It can be overwhelming to lead in an environment where criticism abounds. The leadership team at the Department of Human Services is one of the best I have ever worked with, and you will see the results of their commitment on every page. Enjoy!

DECEMBER EDITION

Children, Vulnerable Adults: All Better off Because of Us

By Carol Sisco

What happened at Human Services last year?

- A young woman previously prone to aggressive outbursts and depression is taking care of herself and ready to move back into the community despite having severe disabilities
- Paternity was established for 95 percent of Utah children born to unwed moms, meaning the kids are eligible for child support and will grow up knowing who their dads are
- Older youth exiting foster care have far more support than before with medical insurance, advanced education and adult mentors helping them through the rough spots
- Soldiers returning from Iraq have more counseling options, recovering substance abusers have a say in the services they need and the voice of mental health consumers is heard as legislators make decisions that affect their lives.

"Sarah" chats with Chris Smith at the Developmental Center

We've had an exciting and productive year at Utah Department of Human Services where almost every decision we make affects the lives of children and vulnerable adults. Rather than telling clients what to do, we work with them and their families and ask for their input as we help them prepare for the future.

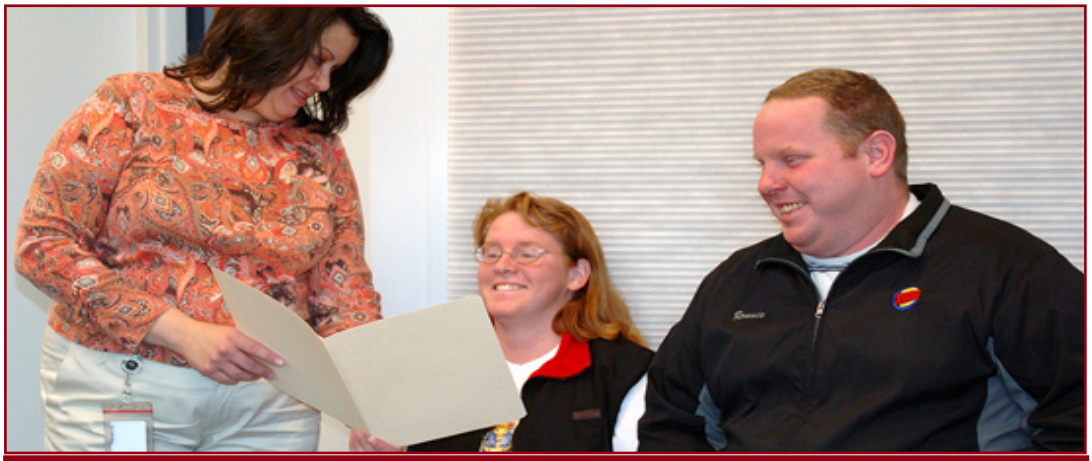
Some of our success stories - and a few of our challenges - from the past year follow as we look forward to the New Year.

Services For People With Disabilities

More people with disabilities are served in their own homes or group homes and in day programs now because a Medicaid waiver that provides alternatives to institutionalized placement was renewed, Disabilities Director George Kelner said.

"It provides more options, allows families to stay together, keeps family members home as long as possible and costs less," Kelner explained. "Some services we're offering people at home now were previously limited to group home residents."

The waiting list for people needing services was reduced for the first time this year because of new appropriations from the Legislature and the Governor. New funds brought about 500 new people into service. However, due to many new individuals becoming eligible for care, the list's total number only went down by about 106 people.



Ronnie Rouse, right, and his sister Ginny Rouse arrange for him to receive services from Services for People With Disabilities worker Ramona Thompson

Developmental Center

"Sarah," 25, arrived at the Developmental Center three years ago. She was highly aggressive, has an intellectual disability, was severely overweight, hearing voices, stealing food, depressed and wouldn't attend work or exercise programs. She moved to the Developmental Center after assaulting employees at her group home.

Medical and behavioral stabilization worked, Developmental Center Director Karen Clarke said.

"We've helped "Sarah" establish structure and routine, she has social friends, is no longer aggressive and doesn't hurt herself," Clarke said. "She also learned to take her own medications."

"Sarah," who is ready to move back to the community, is just one example of people with significant medical and behavioral challenges who are stabilized at the center and return to more independent lifestyles. The center's daily costs of approximately $400 per client are also about $100 less than most surrounding Western states.

Recovery Services

Obtaining child support and other benefits for children is impossible if you don't know who their father's are. Federal law also requires states to determine paternity for at least 90 percent of children born to unwed moms each year. Utah's Recovery Services office feared they wouldn't reach their goal this year. But by year's end they'd exceeded it, reaching 95.6 percent.

"The numbers go down because many mothers and fathers are unwilling to sign voluntary paternity acknowledgements in hospitals," Director Mark Brasher said. "We received a federal grant for an outreach program and sent two workers out to hospitals and other agencies that work with unwed moms like WIC, Baby Your Baby and others."

"Our main goal is getting child support because it helps children," he said. "Others are eligible for Social Security benefits if the father died or if they have a disability." Establishing paternity also helps people establish their medical history and make health-care decisions later in life.

"Utah Recovery Services gives Utah families hope," said one mother who was helped. "If it hadn't been for all the support of the ORS workers I don't know how my little family would have made it. I hope each person up there knows how much they helped my family throughout the years."

Substance Abuse & Mental Health

EASY – or Eliminate Alcohol Sales to Youth – was created by the Legislature last year and is a major campaign at Utah Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health. The dangers of underage drinking aired in a media campaign, and sting operations made sure stores didn't sell kids beer. The agency also held 29 town hall meetings that reached more than 2,000 people.

The EASY campaign targets the dangers of underage drinking

Director Mark Payne also reorganized the agency's structure so that equal emphasis is placed on both substance abuse and mental health issues.

"We have deputies over each side, expanded finances, and we're generating good data," he said. The agency also offered counties more flexibility in preparing their local area plans so that "they put together what they what to accomplish rather than just completing a work assignment," Payne added

"Utah's mental health system also is starting to assure that services go to all people rather than just Medicaid recipients," Payne said. "It will become more of a true mental health system by serving all in need. We're also linking services to what people need." Very often those services include helping them find housing, work and developing skills needed to become independent and support themselves.

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Other initiatives include:

- Participating in creating a comprehensive Utah Suicide Prevention Plan rather than focusing prevention efforts solely on youth
- Working with returning soldiers to help them readjust from war
- Participating on the Governor's Meth Task Force
- Organizing SARA, the Substance Abuse Recovery Alliance of Utah, which is a group of 500 people in recovery who are willing to speak out

Utah State Hospital

Utah State Hospital, like other health care facilities nationwide, experienced a shortage of nurses, psychiatrists and pharmacists.

"Surviving the nursing shortage was one of our greatest accomplishments," Supt. Dallas Earnshaw said. "Careful planning, talking to nurses, effective resource allocation, a comprehensive recruitment and retention program and much hard work by the nursing administration made this possible."

The nursing shortage decreased from 29 employees, or 30 percent, to a vacancy rate of five nurses, about four percent of total nurses.

Nurse Susan Hendy talks to a patient at Utah State Hospital

Child and Family Services

"The most important event in our agency is what happens when one of our frontline staff meets with the people we serve," Child and Family Services Director Richard Anderson said. "The whole focus is on having people accept the help they truly need. The biggest change we've made is providing the frontline worker with the skills they need to help keep children safe and help families succeed."

"We've also increased community involvement because child welfare really is a community of services, not just one agency," Anderson continued. "The work our staff does is very important, but ultimately it is the community support that children and families receive that makes the difference."

All workers are trained to provide each family individualized services while making sure that both parents and children tell us what they need," Anderson said. "And 90 percent of families tell us they're satisfied with the services they receive."

Child and Family Services developed a unified way of doing business statewide that they call the Practice Model. It includes helping children in many ways:

- Greater success is achieved in reunifying children with their parents
- Children who can't go back home are adopted faster in Utah than anywhere in the nation. They are generally adopted within 19-to-21 months. The time frame is even lower for infants who usually have a new home within 18 months
- Each family receives a unique plan for success designed by the family's normal support systems and child welfare professionals.

Older youth moving out of the foster care system used to take one class on how to survive as they leave foster care, Anderson said. "Now we've built support systems for housing, advanced schooling, health care, focused on the long-term view and found at least one adult mentor for each older youth. We need to have something for the long-haul that people can continue to use."

Supervisor Lori Holmes. right. discusses an emergency foster care placement with DCFS workers, from left, Sarah Jennings, Bethany Griffiths, Veronica Kasprzak and Becky Herheim in the Clearfield office

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Communications

When abusers murdered three children within three weeks last August, Human Services spokeswoman Carol Sisco talked about child-abuse prevention in media interviews. All major statewide television stations and newspapers ran extensive stories in English and Spanish. Sisco also reached out to the Spanish-speaking community by training seven Spanish-speaking workers to conduct media interviews.

Spanish-speaking workers Luis DeLa Cruz, left, from Juvenile Justice Services, and Esmeralda Malili and Flavia Cervino-Wood from DCFS talk about generating news stories for the Latino community

Juvenile Justice Services

A Kearns High School choir performs a Christmas program at Wasatch Youth Center's chapel

If youth do well in school and with their families and are held accountable for their actions in the community, they're less likely to get in trouble. Juvenile Justice Services and the courts are using an evaluation process based on that philosophy called the Risk Assessment Process.

"If their academic and social functioning improves, they are less likely to commit crimes when they leave us and return to the community," Juvenile Justice Services Director Dan Maldonado said.

"Joint projects with the juvenile courts lead to better continuity of care," he said. "The courts measure needs and risks and degree of change over time. We measure a kid in his environment; how they're functioning as an individual, in the family and in the community. We really try to build on strengths and reduce deficits at the individual family and community level for each of our kids."

Juvenile Justices also is working on early intervention services so "we can look at kids early before they're in serious trouble," Maldonado said. "If we reduce problems then, they may not progress further along the system."

Counselor Amos Bright works with Wasatch Youth Center clients

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Aging & Adult Services

Aging and Adult Services has greatly improved their relationship with the local aging agencies that provide seniors direct services like Meals on Wheels.

"We built trust with local directors by eliminating perceptions of favoritism, always met with key stakeholders when we were proposing change and made our decision-making as transparent as possible," Director Alan Ormsby said. "Ultimately that helps clients since the agencies and the division are focused on service delivery rather than conflict. I believe we're serving people rather than solely administering a program."

Adult Protective Services also improved its system for measuring how cases are resolved. "We successfully resolve about 75 percent of cases," Ormsby said.

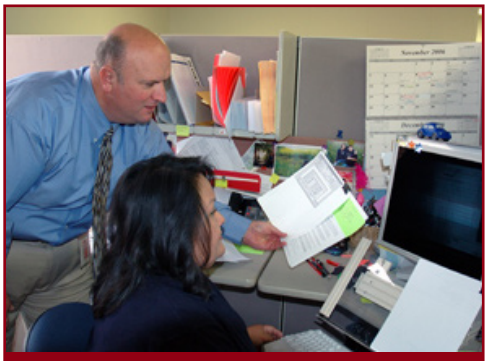
Licensing

Licensing employees receive more comprehensive statewide training now which resulted in more consistent actions among licensors and a better understanding of their responsibility to enforce rules, Director Ken Stettler said.

"We haven't had any major incidents, fatalities or injuries in licensed facilities over the past 18 months," he said. "It's a testament to our charge to protect clients through basic health and safety measures, and we believe it is a direct result of better training."

Licensing also reorganized its criminal background screening unit so that each technician is responsible for a caseload of assigned programs rather than just completing one part of the screening process and passing it on to another worker.

"The results include quicker processing, better tracking, fewer errors and a reduction in complaints to near zero," Stettler said.



Licensing Director Ken Stettler watches as Judy Haswood completes a criminal background screening

Public Guardian

Director Lori Bays reached out to Legislators, community groups and the public to let them know her office serves as the legal decision-maker for individuals who are alone in the world and no longer capable of making decisions for themselves due to mental incapacity, often from age-related dementia or a developmental disability.

"We have 230 clients now and we're doing everything we can to meet the growing need," she said.

The guardian's office also raises funds to provide clients with items they wouldn't otherwise be able to afford like new clothing, hygiene items, burial plans and cash to pay for things such as fixing an electronic talk box that was one person's only way of communicating.

Loading up packages for people who wouldn't have a Christmas otherwise are Office of Public Guardian Director Lori Bays, right, with Karen Bradford, left, and Leslie Barton

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